DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 743 CG 023 047

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TITLE Departmental Issues in Dual-Academic Marriages.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (98th, Boston, MA, August 10-14, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Rank (Professional); *College Faculty; *Dual Career Family; *Faculty College Relationship; Faculty Promotion; *Faculty Recruitment; Higher Education; *Personnel Policy; Psychologists; *Spouses; Women Faculty

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses issues pertaining to the recruitment and hiring of dual-career academic couples by universities and psychology departments. Studies have shown that both husbands and wives in dual psychologist couples are more productive in number of publications, paper presentations, and grants awarded than their single counterparts, yet many universities are reluctant to hire academic couples because of psychological resistance, small group dynamics, and self-esteem maintenance issues. University issues may include reactance, exploitative bargaining, and fear of precedence. Exploitative bargaining--offering part-time or adjunct appointment to a spouse (usually a wife)--is often an issue which can result in a dissatisfied spouse inducing her partner to leave. Universities also fear that hiring a spouse will lead to an avalanche of requests for all spouses, both academic and nonacademic, to be hired by the university. Departmental issues include discrimination against couples by others in the department; fears of recruitment committees about the adequate differentiation of partners in publication credits, evaluation, and tenure review; and fear of the loss of both partners if one or the other accepts a new position. Small group dynamics at the departmental level include concern about couples forming power blocs or conversely the fears that disruptions in the marriage will adversely affect departmental politics. Finally, the old guard faculty is likely to have fears about disrupting the status quo. (TE)

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Departmental Issues in Dual-Academic Marriages

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Special thanks to Barbara and Irwin Sarason, Fran Deutsch and Faye Crosby who were participants with us in a symposium for Division 9 entitled "Professional Issues for Academic Couples: Identity, Stress and Social Support" at the 98th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association in Boston, MA, August, 1990.

CG023047

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Departmental Issues in Dual-Academic Marriages

Anita P. Barbee and Michael R. Cunningham

There are several reasons why some progressive universities and psychology departments are beginning to recruit dual-career academic couples. Pingree et al. (1978) found in a study assessing advantages and disadvantages of hiring dual-academic teams that such couples tend to be highly committed to the academic life, are mutually supportive of each other's professional goals (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1985) and are likely to become committed to the university that is willing to provide a setting for their productivity and provide two faculty salaries.

It has been our observation that some universities recruit dual-academic couples so as to draw better, qualified people than they might otherwise recruit. These types of institutions might include less prestigious universities who desire to build a department in a certain discipline, and universities in less desirable locations such as in small towns or remote areas of the country. We have also become aware of some progressive, top universities who have open-lines available for spouses so that they will not lose those individuals they are eager to attract. Other universities may have read the literature that suggests that members of dual academic marriages are more productive than others (Bryson et al., 1976; Bryson & Bryson, 1980). Bryson et al. (1976) found that husbands in dual psychologist couples were more productive in number of publications, paper presentations and grants awarded than male controls, wives in dual psychologist

couples, and female controls. The second most productive group was the male control group. But, wives of dual psychologist couples were more productive in number of publications, paper presentations and grants awarded than were female controls. These wives were also equal to male controls in number of grants awarded. It also appears from the Bryson et al. data that dual academic pairs are more productive in terms of both publications and grants even if the two do not publish together.

Yet, universities which recruit dual-career couples may not be the norm. Many universities are reluctant to hire academic couples (Pingree, et al., 1978; Moore, 1980). Much of this reluctance is interpretable in terms of psychological reactance theory, small group dynamics, and self-esteem maintenance processes.

University Issues

University issues may include reactance, exploitative bargaining and fear of precedence. If the two professionals have different specialities, the two academic departments may not be at the same point in their recruiting cycles, and the department that is not ready to make a hire may not be cooperative. The slower department may feel coerced and display excessive criticality when asked to accept a new faculty member to accomodate the goals of another department. Often times, to cover up for the uncomfortable feelings that this reactance arouses, the deans and departmental chairs try to give a rational justification to avoid hiring both members of a dual academic couple in the same university. They may claim that they do not

want to look like they are employing nepotism and will call for a national search for the other position. Some anti-discrimination laws have been interpreted by academic administrators, with no formal legal training, as prohibitions against walk-in interviews and creating positions for people without a national search. Such interpretations may keep dual-career couples from competing in the job market together (Moore, 1980).

A second problem that is likely to arise at the university level is exploitive bargaining. Some university deans and departmental chairs, knowing how difficult it is for members of dual academic couples to find jobs in the same place, at the same time, may gamble that they can get the services of one for a cut-rate price as a part-time or adjunct appointment. The dean or chair then saves the cost of a second tenure track position (Matthews & Matthews, 1978; 1980). This exploitation is more likely to be directed toward the wife than the husband. In the Bryson et al., 1976 study, comments by wives included grievances that have been voiced repeatedly by women in academia (Heckman, Bryson, & Bryson, 1977; Bird & Bird, 1987): unwillingness to offer tenure-track positions, offers of part-time work only, part-time pay for full-time work, and in general, a tendency to capitalize on the wife's availability without providing ordinary job benefits. It has been our impression that when a department is making a major effort to recruit a wife, they are likely to go to extra effort to provide a tenure track position for the husband. If a department is making an effort to recruit a husband, they are much less likely to devote 100% effort and

expense to provide a first class position to the wife. This is, of course, a manifestation of sexism. Along with being a sexist behavior, it may also be to the university's disadvantage, in the long run, since a disatisfied spouse is likely to induce their partner to leave, leading to additional costs in recruiting and hiring another person for their position. Therefore, the university might as well make everyone happy from the outset.

Finally, many university deans may fear that hiring a spouse will lead to an avalanche of requests for all spouses, both academic and nonacademic, to be hired by the university. Usually this is a smoke-screen tactic to discourage novel ideas.

Departmental Issues

Coupleism

Several departmental issues may arise when two members of a dual-academic couple apply for jobs in a single department. The first is what we call "coupleism". Whenever things are outside normal schematic processing, people tend to be more critical and more negative. To some degree, this represents fear of the unknown. Just as ethnic minorities experienced racism and women experienced sexism when they entered the job market, we submit that individuals in dual career marriages experience "coupleism". Coupleism is a tendency to anticipate and focus on problems associated with hiring couples, even though equal or greater problems could occur in other types of departmental hires.

Fears of Recruitment Committees

A second problem occurs in the fears manifested by recruitment and personnel committees. The first is the fear of

not being able to evaluate the two people. Some committees find it difficult to see both members of a dual-academic couple as separate people, especially if they collaborate (Bird & Bird, 1987). They worry about whether it is fair to credit collaborative papers to both spouses, especially if the couple has higher than average publication rates. Such issues are not raised for other collaborations.

Recruitment and Personnel Committees must see the members of dual-academic marriages as two distinct people. Many teams of colleagues collaborate, but the individuals are seen as two separate and valuable members of their department. There are several ways that the committee can overcome this bias. Committees can evaluate the number of first and later authorships on papers by members of a dual academic career couples. The committees can also look at how the two people define themselves in terms of areas of expertise, and methodological strength. The chances are that the couple has worked so that each person is differentiated to maximize their effectiveness, rather than sharing redundant skills.

A second fear of recruitment committees is what will happen at the time of the tenure review. Committees worry about the possibility that one person could be superior and would easily attain tenure, and the partner could not perform well enough to receive tenure. Such committees may be unaware of the similarity-attraction relationship; individuals tend to marry those who have similar talents. Couples recognize that there is no guarantee that anyone will get tenure. Recruitment committees

have to base their hiring decision on the knowledge they gain about the candidates in the interview and vita, and then hope for the best. They need to be willing to take a risk like they do with any job candidate. The evidence suggests that the dual career couple will attain at least as much productivity as any other two faculty members (Bryson, et al., 1976).

The third fear of recruitment committees is that if tenure fails, or if the couple becomes unhappy that two slots will then be open at the same time. This would lead to more work for the committee in that they would have to search for two people rather than simply one person to fill vacancies. However, recruitment committees tend to overlook the fact that couples are happiest and most productive if they can be at the same institution. From the standpoint of commuting, coordination of childcare, and research collaboration, it is best to work in the same university, thus, much of the time, having two slots open will not be a problem.

Small Group Dynamics

Small group dynamics also come into play at the departmental level. If the two professionals seek positions in the same department, there are a wide range of group structural concerns, some expressed, many unvoiced, that may impede the couple's acceptance. In many departments there is a fear that hiring a dual-academic couple will cause disruptions in the department. One fear is that the two people will form a power block. There is the unfounded belief that members of a couple will always think and act alike in departmental decisions.

However, this rarely occurs because most faculty members see a dual academic couple as a unit, therefore, members of dual academic marriages tend to have only one voice, not two, weakening rather than strengthening their impact on departmental politics.

Another worry is about disruptions in the marriage. There is the converse concern that a couple's arguments, jealousy or competitiveness will spill over to affect departmental politics. Of course, academic departments often involve faculty quarrels which make the worst domestic fights seem tame. In addition, members of dual-academic marriages probably get along better, on average, than other faculty members, but we know of cases in which dual-academic couples have divorced and remained congenial members of a department.

Individual colleague reactions include self-esteem threat, and fear of disrupting the status quo. Because many dual-academic couples outperform other faculty members, self-esteem maintenance dynamics may come into play (Tesser, 1988). Some faculty members may perceive that they will be at a competitive disadvantage in attracting or funding graduate students, especially if they do not possess a strong collaborative relationship with any other faculty member. The jealousy may lead to interferance with the couples' hiring or advancement. In an open atmosphere, members of departments will see that they can bask in the reflected glory of their productive colleagues rather than seeing themselves as diminished by comparison. They could see that productive members of the department help everyone

by attracting students, money, and prestige to the university and to the department.

Fear of disrupting the status quo is another unvoiced concern in many departments. The old guard faculty are most accustomed to colleagues who are free to devote themselves exclusively to their careers, because they have spouses who can care for the children and the domestic details. The old guard may have learned to accept female colleagues who adopted the male career style of segregating work and family life. They may feel quite uncomfortable, however, about dual-career couples because work and family life tends to be intermingled (Heckman, et al, 1977). The male may spend two days a week watching his children while analysing data on a laptop computer. The female may bring children into the office, and meet with advisees with a baby in her lap. The fear that a dual academic career couple will alter the atmosphere of the department may be justified.

Unfortunately, most universities and department do not, yet, see the flaws in their arguments against hiring dual-academic couples, or the solutions to these problems. Hopefully, with an increase in open dialogue about the issues surrounding dual-academic couples and with an increase in their numbers change will occur in the future.

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